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This thesis purports to delineate certain factors in the Southern experience which have tended to render this region of the United States "distinctive"--resulting in a mystique which this writer, among many others, proposes is an actuality.

The theories of the more eminent Southern historians have been investigated and an attempt has been made to present their findings as to what specifically constitutes Southern distinctiveness. Some chapters will focus on certain theories, rather than upon individual historians. The contributions of belles-lettrists, major journalists, and certain other intellectuals are also utilized because of the major role they have played in analyzing their region.

The overall effort has been, first, to winnow the enormous amount of available material, then to synthesize it--and finally to arrive at a meaningful conclusion as to the ingredients of a Southern mystique and the possibility of a valuable distinctiveness that the South possesses.

Major factors involved in this distinctiveness appeared to be the presence of the Negro-as-former-slave and the white man's determination to keep him in a subordinate position . . . the Southerner's distinctive psychology of polarities that involves, among other things, a pronounced religiosity combined with a taste for violence . . . a magnificent and distinctive literature . . . and a tragic, still-relevant history--a combination of factors which, it is hoped, may well bring the South to a position of leadership in this nation in the difficult area of race relations.

THE "DISTINCTIVE" SOUTH: FORTY-YEAR QUEST FOR A
" REGIONAL MYSTIQUE (1928-1968)

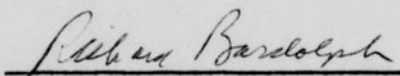
by

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INTRODUCTION:

THE MYTHS EXAMINED

Is the South distinctive?

This is a question that has been answered in the affirmative many times by many historians--and hundreds of times by editors and fiction writers, nostalgic old ladies and conniving demagogues. The literature on the subject is so vast that the problem of isolating certain complex factors that account for Southern singularity becomes essentially one of selectivity.

One must recognize, as a start, that even if objective factors were lacking, this geographic region felt itself so distinctive and so unique that in 1861 it saw fit to divorce itself from the United States and proclaim itself a separate nation . . . and then fight for four long and bloody years to preserve this separateness, only for defeat that brought a strengthening of the mystique, a solidifying of the Southern mind, and a glorification of the concept of "Southernness." And so pervasive has been this mystique that for over 100 years, the South has maintained an identity awash with legend--reviled by millions as the problem one-third of a nation, adored by millions more as the promised land.

The mystique has survived beyond the popular level, perpetuated by such august institutions as the Southern Historical Association and its Journal of Southern History, the scholarly ten-volume History

of the South that treats the region as a distinctive reality--and by the avalanche of books and articles that have poured from the presses, offering explanatory factors by the score. The South, says Samuel S. Hill, Jr., is "the most studied region in the world."¹

Theories advanced as to Southern distinctiveness have ranged from the incongruous to the profound. Was it the climate? The plantation system and the subsequent rural society? The prevalence of the English country gentleman ideal? Is there some mystical Southern instinct for violence . . . or is it simply the fact of defeat and poverty in a nation dedicated to success and affluence? Was it the one-party system . . . or the one-crop economy? Orthodox fundamentalism or fear of change? Or merely the presence of the Negro--and the determination to maintain white supremacy.

Each of these theories, and others, have been advanced, and the idea of distinctiveness has lived on, possessing both validity and substance, but partaking inevitably of myth. It is this mythology, if you will, that has especially concerned historian George B. Tindall, who has sought to sort out, and demolish, certain of the myths of Southern distinctiveness.

"Few areas of the modern world," says Tindall, "have bred a regional mythology so potent, so profuse and diverse, even so paradoxical as the American South." Social myths, he says, are simply the

¹Samuel S. Hill, Jr., Southern Churches in Crisis (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 8.

"mental pictures that portray the pattern of what a people think they are (or ought to be) or what somebody thinks they are." These social myths are "abstract ideas forced into an image . . . a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life."¹

Tindall regards these "myths" as definite realities of history, "significantly influencing the course of human action for good or ill." And the Southern mind, he says, receptive as it is to the concrete and dramatic, is "unusually susceptible to mythology."²

The standard stereotype, of course, is the Plantation Myth, celebrated in song and story from Swallow Barn (1832) to Gone with the Wind more than 100 years later. But there are lesser myths as well, equally long-lived: that of the po' white trash degenerates such as Erskine Caldwell's Jeeter Lester and Faulkner's Ab Snopes, who had their early-day counterparts in one Ransy Sniffle of A. B. Longstreet's Georgia Scenes (1834). Other stereotypes as well have sought to delineate the region: H. L. Mencken's Savage South, proclaimed in the "Sahara of the Bozart". . . the promised land myth of the New South prophets . . . the "problem South" of regional sociologists Howard Odum and Rupert Vance . . . the Traditional South of the Vanderbilt Agrarians, partaking of the Plantation Myth but adding to it . . . the Militant South . . . the Jeffersonian South . . . the Conservative

¹George B. Tindall, "Mythology: A New Frontier in Southern History," in Frank Vandiver, ed., The Idea of the South (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 2.

South, each a stereotype, each with its proponents.¹

The quest for myth continues, on the part of historians and laymen alike. A persistent urge to identify the Southern essence is felt not only by long-time Southerners but by newly-arrived and transplanted ones as well; and the very fact of their efforts provides additional evidence that there is reality in this maze of myth that permeates the Southern region.

This paper will attempt to examine certain factors that account for a Southern distinctiveness that has produced what has come to be called the Southern mystique.

¹Ibid., pp. 3-9.

CHAPTER I

THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

It is oversimplification to state that Southern distinctiveness begins and ends with the "race problem." Other regions of the United States are also plagued with "race" problems--Oriental-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and, most markedly, Afro-Americans. It is this latter group, of course, that Gunnar Myrdal refers to as the central element of an "American Dilemma"--not, one notes, a Southern dilemma. "The American Negro problem is a problem in the heart of the American," he writes. "It is there that the interracial tension has its focus. It is there that the decisive struggle goes on."¹

But there is a different dimension to this struggle in the South, one that was created out of the history of the region. According to Professor Kenneth Stampp, the tragedy of the South began not with the ordeal of Reconstruction, nor the agony of Civil War--but with the growth of a "peculiar institution"--chattel slavery. And, says Stampp, the "spiritual stresses and the unremitting social tensions created by this institution became an inescapable part of life in the Old South."²

When we go one step beyond Stampp, it becomes apparent that the

¹Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), p. lxxi.

²Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 3.

legacy of chattel slavery has been "spiritual stresses and unremitting social tensions" not only in the Old South of which he was writing-- but also throughout the period that has comprised the New South.

It might be said that the distinctive mark of the Southern region has been not merely the presence of the Negro per se but the historical fact of the Negro-as-slave--and the acceptance of the myth that the black man was inferior and uniquely fitted for bondage. This was the sort of racist dogma, says Stamp, that dominated the thinking of antebellum Southerners. Such doctrines, however, by no means died with slavery. Their persistence, resulting until very recently in a legalized, segregated society, has plagued the South ever since the Civil War, and, indeed, continues to plague it today.

Following the war, bitter struggles ensued to determine precisely what social system should replace slavery. Federal troops left the South in 1877, writes C. Vann Woodward, and the Negro was abandoned as a ward of the nation. Attempts to guarantee his civil and political equality were given up--and the problem was left with the dominant Southern whites. Jim Crow did not arrive overnight; the Negro's new status was not, in fact, at once apparent, for the whites themselves were not so united on that subject as has been generally assumed.¹ Woodward spells it out succinctly, also noting that the term "Jim Crow laws" first appeared in a dictionary in 1904:

¹C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 6.

The determination of the Negro's 'place' took shape gradually under the influence of economic and political conflicts among divided white people--conflicts that were eventually resolved in part at the expense of the Negro. In the early years of the twentieth century, it was becoming clear that the Negro would be effectively disfranchised throughout the South, that he would be firmly relegated to the lower rungs of the economic ladder, and that neither equality nor aspirations for equality in any department of life were for him.

The public symbols and constant reminders of his inferior position were the segregation statutes, or "Jim Crow" laws. They constituted the most elaborate and formal expression of sovereign white opinion upon the subject. In bulk and detail as well as in effectiveness of enforcement, the segregation codes were comparable with the black codes of the old regime, though the laxity that mitigated the harshness of the black codes were replaced by a rigidity that was more typical of the segregation code. That code lent the sanction of law to a racial ostracism that extended to virtually all forms of public transportation, to sports and recreations, to hospitals, orphanages, prisons and asylums, and ultimately to funeral homes, morgues, and cemeteries.¹

Segregation, Woodward points out, was born in the North and reached an advanced age before moving South. (It would have been an inconvenience and obstruction to the functioning of the slave system, which encouraged a degree of intimacy between the races. Control was best achieved by contact in the slave society.)²

Thus, in the 1890's, American "apartheid" legally came into being. Economically unsound, psychologically demeaning, and morally unjust, these so-called Jim Crow laws well represented what Frank Vandiver terms the South's "faulty response to challenge"--in this instance the distinctive challenge presented by the presence of

¹C. Vann Woodward, pp. 6-7.

²Ibid., pp. 17, 12.

the free black man.¹

For more than a half-century the blacks and whites lived side by side, yet totally separate, often in relationships characterized by true affection, but much of the time utilizing what David Bertelson has called "devices for minimizing friction at the most intimate and personal level . . . focusing always on appearances rather than human emotions."²

The system was one that demanded total inconsistencies in thinking and behavior. A pattern of life grew up wherein black women raised the white man's children (sometimes receiving his sexual favors as well) and cooked the meals his family ate. But by law the same black woman waited for trains in a separate (but never equal) waiting room, rode by law in a segregated Jim Crow coach--and ate, if she should leave that coach, in a dining car behind a curtain. And all the while the white man proclaimed to one and all, as he still is wont to do, that the blacks were just simple-minded, happy, obsequious children--but fear festered over the Negro's alleged sexual intentions toward white women.

In the view of historian James Silver, the South's extreme psychological commitment to the Jim Crow society is a more vital thing than the actual institution of segregation. Speaking specifically of his former state of Mississippi, Silver writes that an "unshakable

¹Frank Vandiver, quoted in David Potter, "On Understanding the South," Journal of Southern History, XXX (Nov., 1964), p. 460.

²David Bertelson, The Lazy South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 241.

psychological adherence to it [segregation] has resulted in the only static society in America's generally dynamic society."¹

Perpetuating this institution has occupied energies better put to use in solving the region's real problems of poverty and disease and illiteracy. But this was the legacy of slavery, this schizoid society, blindly clasping and rationalizing an unjust, outmoded way of life. One wonders at the generations of white parents, explaining the "why" of such life patterns to their children; and one aches for the black parents, who could only say that this was the way things were.

If one considers the popular media as well as works of scholarship, it becomes apparent that the recent profusion of literature relative to the "Southern race problem" would fill the combined libraries of all Southern communities. It is probable that the majority of the words which are actually read are the more sensational ones, the articles that tell of violence and dissension between the races, of the alleged savagery and ignorance of the Negro--words and images that reinforce the deep prejudice in the Southern psyche. Articles and books, on the other hand, that purport to examine Southern progress, are generally read by teachers and students, by editors and ministers.

But this profusion of prose is a relatively new phenomenon. Race was scarcely written about, talked about, faced up to, or dealt with at all by most whites until the past forty years. This subject

¹James W. Silver, quoted in David Potter, "On Understanding the South," Journal of Southern History, XXX (Nov., 1964), p. 453.

that has so preoccupied the Southern mind since the early 1830's, inhibiting creative efforts in practically every area of life--the subject that can turn a basically kindly folk into closed-minded (and even vicious) bigots--was spoken of in euphemism and written about scarcely at all.¹

The actual mind and thought processes of the black man were totally unknown to the whites, and on the surface at any rate--despite deep-down fears--the white man tended to regard the Negro as a figure for fun, exploitation, and "charity" . . . clearly inferior. As Myrdal put it, Negroes were regarded as "criminal and of disgustingly but somewhat enticingly, loose sexual morals; . . . religious with a gift for dancing and singing; and that they are the happy-go-lucky children of nature who get a kick out of life which white people are too civilized to get."² One thinks of the lazy Stepinfetchit, Amos and Andy, and of Bill ("Bojangles") Robinson who danced on the stairs with Shirley Temple--these were the visible black symbols of the early 1930's, harmless and entertaining like Uncle Remus or a minstrel show . . . soothing the tiger in the Southern psyche.

Yet all the while it was there, this beast, compounded of fears and hatred and guilt, but restrained, mostly, with condescending kindness.

¹Growing up in the early 1930's in small town South, I never heard the subject broached, though by the late 30's the phenomenon of "Eleanor" jokes had appeared. Yet, amazingly, this town had an Interracial Commission in the 1920's.

²Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, p. 48.

It was in 1928 that an historian first came to grips with it, spelled out his analysis of it, and held up his results for the scholarly community to see--although the same historian had anticipated the idea somewhat in his book American Negro Slavery, which appeared in 1918. The fact that he implicitly approved of what he found was certainly not to his credit, but Ulrich B. Phillips was of another generation and he was the first who attempted to "tell it like it was." His essay, "The Central Theme of Southern History" is a landmark in Southern historiography--and the point of departure for this particular exploration of the problem of Southern distinctiveness.

He sets the scene in his book Life and Labor in the Old South with the following passage, which leads inexorably to his discussion of race per se:

Let us begin by discussing the weather, for that has been the chief agency in making the South distinctive. It fostered the cultivation of the staple crops, which promoted the plantation system which brought the importation of Negroes, which not only gave rise to chattel slavery, but created a lasting race problem. These led to controversy and regional rivalry for power, which produced apprehensive reactions and culminated in a stroke for independence.¹

Thus in two sentences the history of the South until the time of the Civil War--and thus the background for Phillips famous essay. "What," he asks, is its [the South's] essence?" And he continues:

Not state rights . . . not free trade . . . not slavery . . .
not democracy . . . not cotton. Yet it is a land with a unity

¹Ulrich B. Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1929), p. 3.

despite its adversity, with a people having common joy and common sorrows, and, above all, as to the white folk a people with a common resolve indomitably maintained that it shall remain a white man's country. Whether expressed with the frenzy of a demagogue or maintained with a patrician's quietude, (this) is the cardinal test of a Southerner and the central theme of Southern history . . . It arose as soon as the Negroes became numerous enough to create a problem of race control in the interest of orderly government and the maintenance of Caucasian civilization . . . Slavery was instituted not merely to provide control of labor but also a system of racial adjustment and social order. To this end were white primaries instituted to control nominations, educational requirements for suffrage inserted in state constitutions. Political solidarity at the price of provincial status is maintained to keep doubly, trebly sure that the South shall remain a white man's country.¹

Edward A. Pollard during the previous century had pointed out in The Lost Cause Regained the necessity of maintaining white supremacy as a safeguard of civilization and orderly government and as a barrier against interracial equality and conflict--but in modern times the Phillips dictum was the first scholarly enunciation of white separatism as the hallmark of Southern distinctiveness.

The challenge, of course, was not unnoticed by black leadership. "From the beginning," wrote Tuskegee's president, Robert R. Moton, in 1929, "the attempt has been made to fix permanently the status of the Negro and so remove the subject from public discussion and agitation." But, he said, "it refused to stay fixed."²

It did, indeed, "refuse to stay fixed." Phillips, in a sense, was writing about an era that was doomed to end in a matter of decades--

¹Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Central Theme of Southern History," American Historical Review, XXXIV (Oct. 1928), p. 31.

²Robert R. Moton, What the Negro Thinks (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1929), pp. 48-49.

though its psychological bases were to linger poisonously.

In the first place, as George Tindall points out, the great migration of the black man northward was beginning. New concepts in anthropology were coming into being which would undermine the intellectual respectability of racism. And the NAACP, outgrowth of the Niagara movement, had come into being, "operating to give the American Negro consciousness of his voting power." The defeat of North Carolina's John J. Parker for Supreme Court justice in 1930 was the first instance of Negro political impact on Congress since Reconstruction, writes Tindall.¹

It is perhaps ironic that it was the conservative historian Phillips who served as spokesman for the unspoken--the unacknowledged motivations of white Southerners. This, so often, is the privilege of the artists, the belles-lettrists; but beyond a purely superficial level they had overlooked the chief drama of the Southern scene before the time of Ulrich Phillips. For once, art followed life rather than the reverse.

It has been said that of our "classic writers not Cash nor Percy nor James Agee--only Lillian Smith had the greatness to wrestle with what the others saw, but passed by, and that was the centrality of race to the Southern self-consciousness."²

¹George Tindall, The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945, Vol. X in Wendell Holmes Stephenson and Martin Coulter, eds., A History of the South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948-1967), p. 541.

²Leslie W. Dunbar, "The Changing Mind of the South," in Avery Leiserson, ed., The American South in the 1960's (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 4.

Other critics, of course, would disagree, perhaps out of a less than thorough knowledge of Lillian Smith's work. (The author of the controversial Strange Fruit, for which she was best known, also served for many years as co-editor of the North Georgia Review, a liberal little magazine decades ahead of its time ideologically.) Andrew Lytle, for example, contends that William Faulkner presented the racial problem more deeply than any other Southern writer. And indeed the Mississippi author did believe that the South was, in his own words, "cursed and doomed by slavery."

But he also saw Negro blood as a source of defilement, especially so in the case of the doomed Charles Bon of Absalom! Absalom! (my own choice as Faulkner's greatest novel). Throughout Faulkner's work, however, run the troubled stories of tragic mulattos, the "defilement" in their blood leading inexorably to doom (e.g. Joe Christmas of Light in August), or at least to a life of unhappiness (Lucas Beauchamp of Intruder in the Dust).

As to this "defilement," Stamp writes that "Only in the mythology of race can one find biological 'proof' of the evils of miscegenation--for example, 'proof' that children of mixed ancestry are likely to be mentally or physically inferior to children of racially 'pure' ancestry."¹

The white Southerner's obvious role in this miscegenation which he claims so to deplore, and has always in fact legally prohibited,

¹Stamp, The Peculiar Institution, p. 350.

is one of those totally inexplicable facts of history, perhaps explainable by some defense mechanism that if one but pretended an unpleasant fact did not exist, it would simply disappear.

The evidence suggests, writes Stampp, that "human behavior in the Old South was very human indeed, that sexual contacts between the races were not the rare aberrations of a small group of depraved whites but a frequent occurrence involving whites of all social and cultural levels."¹

The specific result, of course, was the mullato, tragic product of the South's slave society. And a passing strange result it was for a people with the "common resolve indomitably maintained that their land shall remain a white man's country."

Students of the South disagree as to the validity of the Phillips theory--and certainly the area of sex would tend to obfuscate the singlemindedness of his white Southerners. But Harry Ashmore, famed former editor of the Little Rock Gazette, is one who accepts the theory. The South will cease, he says, when it ceases to be segregated.²

Charles A. Sellers is less arbitrary. "Would the decline and fall of white supremacy necessarily reduce the South to merely another geographic part of the United States?" he asks. "Only if we accept the Phillips dictum. Though it has been an important key to Southern

¹Kenneth Stampp, p. 351.

²Harry Ashmore, An Epitaph for Dixie (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1957), p. 24.

character," he continues, "we cannot continue to regard it as an immutable feature of Southern life."¹ One is more inclined to accept the moderation of this view.

In Mississippi, what James W. Silver calls the "psychological commitment" to segregation continues, but elsewhere the pattern is wavering, not only by edict but in reality . . . yet the South as an entity continues.

Howard Zinn maintains that segregation could have been maintained if Southerners had cared enough. But they cared about other things more, like monetary profit and political power, like the approval of their immediate peers and conforming to the dominant decision--and staying out of jail. The Southern white, says Zinn, has a hierarchy of values; segregation was desirable, but other things are more so.²

He contends that action must precede thought in this instance. "First change the way people behave, and then they will change the way they think."³ Perhaps even in Mississippi, given time; but certainly in other areas of the South.

"Southern race relations in the past have been like an unfaithful marriage that can only be preserved by two partners not speaking the truth to each other," writes Leslie W. Dunbar.⁴ Today, he says,

¹Charles G. Sellers, Jr., ed., The Southerner as American (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1960), p. 125.

²Howard Zinn, The Southern Mystique (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), Introduction.

³Ibid., p. 18.

⁴Dunbar, "Changing Mind of the South," loc. cit., p. 5.

the Negro is speaking the truth, and a distinctive facet of the Southern mystique--probably the most significant facet--is crumbling. But not without disruption and despair and difficult days. The legacy of slavery will continue to produce difficulties and disruption and, in some quarters, despair, as with some Greek tragedy wherein the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

CHAPTER II

SEARCH FOR A CENTRAL THEME

Southern historians through the years have devoted considerable energies to seeking some central theme, some keystone, that would illuminate and synthesize existing patterns in that baffling chunk of terrain, the American South. Many and varied are the theses that have been offered; several--especially that of Ulrich B. Phillips--are presented at length elsewhere in this paper. But there are others of significance that have been developed as well, major voices such as that of C. Vann Woodward, and also numerous minor ones.

As early as 1911, for example, Henry S. Hartzog, who was no historian but was secretary of the Arkansas Education Commission, proclaimed that the central fact in Southern history was "ignorance."¹ Considering the illiteracy statistics of the period, there was something to be said for his view.

"Laziness" to David Bertelson is a central characteristic of the South. He defines his term as the "absence of rational, purposeful, socially oriented labor."² He gives some historical explanations for this absence: the slave economy, a consequent disdain for work, poor

¹Thomas D. Clark and Albert D. Kirwan, The South since Appomattox (Oxford: New York, 1967), p. 2.

²David Bertelson, The Lazy South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 82.

food and ill health traceable to poverty, plus a respect for leisure and the fondness of Southerners for enjoying themselves. He admits, however, that in these changing times there is a "new busy-ness in pursuit of private gain."¹

In a somewhat different connection Bartelson makes two penetrating observations of concern not only to social historians but to newly-arrived Southerners. First, although Southern manners give the appearance of intimacy and even affection, there is an element of formality in the closest of relationships. Contacts between the races in the past have been to an extent based on this formality; it has served as a device for minimizing frictions. Second, the Southern emphasis on personal relations focuses on appearances rather than human emotions; there is a tendency to ignore how people really feel.²

But there are additional theories as to central factors. David L. Smiley, like Phillips and various other historians, ascribes considerable importance to the "casual effects of environment and the [consequent] development of certain acquired characteristics of the people called Southern."³ The distinctive climate and weather, he says, resulted in a slower pace of life, tempered the speech, and dictated a system of staple crops and Negro slavery.

¹Bartelson, The Lazy South, p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 43.

³David Smiley, "Search for a Central Theme" in Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., ed., The South and the Sectional Image (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 18.

Henry Savage, Jr., agrees that climate is a major factor in rendering the South a section apart--along with ruralism, the Negro, and poverty. But he contends that each of these factors has been greatly modified within the twentieth century, climate in particular, by the advent of widespread air-conditioning. But unlike many of his colleagues, Savage feels that the South is aggressively pursuing change and warmly embracing it. "If the South is dying," he maintains, "it is at the hands of Southerners."¹

Thomas Clark would concur. "The central fact of Southern history in the past half century," he says, "has been the struggle to revise the regional economy."²

Every Southern historian would agree that changes in the economy were essential. As long ago as 1942, Benjamin Kendrick pointed out that for three centuries the South had endured the status of a colony in an imperialistic United States--a distasteful distinction.³ This "economic serfdom," as Kendrick called it, would result in the South's being labeled by President Roosevelt as "the nation's number one economic problem."

Change was certainly essential--but resistance to change is considered to be more characteristic of the South. It accounts for much that is distinctive in the Southern pattern: a continuing folk

¹Henry Savage, Jr., Seeds of Time: The Background of Southern Thinking (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1959), p. 271.

²Thomas Clark, "The South in Cultural Change," in Allan P. Sindler, ed., Change in the Contemporary South (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), p. 23.

³Benjamin Kendrick, "Colonial Status of the South," Journal of Southern History, VIII, (February, 1942), p. 3.

culture, for example. David Potter finds that this cultural form has continued to flourish in the South long after other parts of the country have succumbed to the onslaught of a standardized urban-industrial culture. This has resulted, in his view, in the maintenance of closer personal relationships than prevail elsewhere and also in a closer relationship between man and nature--features notably lacking in an industrial culture. Such factors, Potter believes, impart a distinctive texture and tempo to Southern life and give it a relatedness and meaning not found in mass culture.¹

The late Howard Odum shared a similar view. "In the South," he said, "the folk were nature-folk longer than in the rest of the nation."² He saw the South as a regional culture that "featured strong individualism, great religious influences, a strong sense of honor and personality, strong allegiance to family and morals, quick tempers and emotional reactions, impatience with organization and formal law and control, love of freedom and the open spaces . . ."³

A somewhat similar compilation--but no single "central theme"--is presented by Clement Eaton in his book The Mind of the Old South. He proposes the following, some of which he admits have disappeared:

¹David Potter, "The Enigma of the South," Yale Review, LI, (Oct. 1961), p. 150.

²Howard Odum, The Way of the South (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1947), p. 15.

³Ibid., p. 29. By 1958, however, he was seeing regionalism as a sort of way station between sectionalism and the complete integration of the South into the national culture--not as a permanent phenomenon.

an exaggerated sense of honor based on the cult of the gentleman, profound religious orthodoxy, intense local attachment supported by strong feeling for family, extreme conservatism, an intolerant spirit in regard to discussion of such sensitive subjects as religion and race feeling.¹

Like Henry Savage, Jr., historian John S. Ezell is skeptical of present-day Southern uniqueness, which he sees only as a "state of mind." He concedes, however, a past distinctiveness and cites several theories as to what constituted it--Avery Craven's country gentleman tradition and Phillips' weather thesis.²

The central theme pursuit is the whole raison d'etre of a book entitled The Idea of the South: Pursuit of a Central Theme, which grew out of a Rice University symposium and was subsequently edited by Frank E. Vandiver. Vandiver contributes an essay reminiscent of John Hope Franklin, entitled "The Southerner as Extremist." He sees violence as an integral part of the Southern character, and speaks of the blood-thirsty ferocity of the lower class and the traditional violence of Southern politics.³

A refreshing, forward-looking point of view is provided in an essay by David Potter quoting historian Walter Webb who states that the South is gradually overcoming its economic handicap and is on the

¹Clement Eaton, The Mind of the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 241.

²John S. Ezell, The South since 1865 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), pp. 4-6.

³Frank Vandiver, ed., The Idea of the South: Pursuit of a Central Theme (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 43.

verge of becoming the dominant region in the American economy. He points to the paradox of a South simultaneously at its political nadir and its economic apex--and also to the irony of the fact that as the South faces the disappearance of historical identity, it may be on the threshold of attaining its greatest fulfillment.¹

Francis Butler Simkins contends that the South is "marked off from other sections of the country almost as sharply as one European nation is distinguished from another."² What he calls a "we-ness," a sectional consciousness, was "born out of the Missouri Compromise."³ A belief in white supremacy, intensive piety, and the country gentleman ideal have reinforced this consciousness.

Several of the volumes of the ten-volume History of the South, edited by Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, offer revealing observations on "Southern-ness" as seen by the various authors represented in the series. There are intimations of things to come in the very first volume, Wesley Frank Craven's The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century 1607-1689. He begins with the statement that "the men and women whose story is recounted [here] were not Southerners . . . They were Europeans and for the most part Englishmen."⁴ But by the end of his story he is stating that "in the growing number of

¹David M. Potter, "On Understanding the South," Journal of Southern History, XXX, (Nov. 1964), p. 462.

²Francis Butler Simkins, The South Old and New (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 490.

⁴Wesley Frank Craven, The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century 1607-1689, Vol. I in History of the South (previously cited), p. xiii.

Negroes, and the continuous necessity for economy in the production of a commodity which depended so much for a market on its cheapness, one traces the forewarning of a tragic commitment to human slavery."¹

"By the end of the Revolutionary epoch," according to Volume III, "the South had emerged as a section and the Southerners as a people different from Northerners . . . there was when Washington assumed the presidency a South at least loosely united and one certainly distinct from a north in terms of climate, slavery, economy, social structure, and political viewpoint."²

The author of Volume IV states that his is the first to deal with the South as a section because there was no real sectionalism until there was nationalism--and after 1789, of course, there was nationalism.³ His [Thomas P. Abernethy's] distinction between the two emerging sections of the new country emphasized their divergent philosophies: "The North inherited a puritanical attitude toward life while the South maintained the traditions of the Mother Country, with her liberal Anglicanism and her stratified society."⁴

The next two volumes reach the heart of the matter and analyze the bitterness and widening conflict that is to culminate in war. By 1848, writes Charles S. Sydnor, "there were Southerners whose minds . . .

¹Ibid., p. 401.

²John R. Alden, The South in the Revolution 1763-1789, Vol. III of The History of the South, p. 2.

³Thomas P. Abernethy, The South in the New Nation 1789-1819, Vol. IV of The History of the South, p. ix.

⁴Ibid., p. x.

with the realization that the power of their opponents was growing, had turned into a curious, psychopathic condition." Though their idealized portrait of their region was false, he continues, it would be a strong force in the years ahead, supplying the romantic legend. And "in the nearer future, it was to give the Confederate soldier something to die for."¹

As the war years approach, the region moves from sectionalism to out-and-out nationalism, which Avery Craven traces in his Growth of Southern Nationalism 1848-1861. "With Lincoln's call for troops, Southern nationalism, long in the making, became a reality,"² he writes. The South, during its evolution toward nationalism, had woven a defense of Southern society based on slavery that found authority in the Bible, in history, in science, and on the assertion of Southern superiority.³

Volumes VII and VIII, both by E. Merton Coulter, describe the total separation of the South from the Union--the story of the Confederacy and Reconstruction. Volume IX, C. Vann Woodward's excellent Origins of the New South, and George Tindall's Emergence of the New South, conclude the series. Each of these men has a provocative theory concerning Southern distinctiveness, examined elsewhere more specifically and succinctly than in the Louisiana State University series. Tindall's "mythology" rationale is analyzed in the introduction to this

¹Charles S. Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism 1819-1848, Vol. V of The History of the South, p. 339.

²Avery O. Craven, The Growth of Southern Nationalism 1848-1861, Vol. VI of The History of the South, p. 390.

³Ibid., p. 395.

paper at some length. Woodward's search for Southern identity is brilliantly expounded in his book of essays, The Burden of Southern History. He finds his central theme in the South's common experience of defeat and its influence on group character.

Many of the old monuments of regional distinctiveness are disappearing, says Woodward, and "it would take a blind sentimentalist to mourn the passing" of certain of them--"the one-horse farmer, one-crop agriculture, one-party politics, the sharecropper, the poll tax, the white primary, the Jim Crow car, the lynching bee. But until the day before yesterday there they stood, indisputable proof that the South was different."¹

Positive changes also exist, says Woodward, and they are symbolized by the bulldozer, steadily "encroaching upon rural life to expand urban life . . . demolishing the old to make way for the new."² In recent years the economic growth of the South has far exceeded the rate maintained in the North and the East--and all indications are that the bulldozer will leave a deeper mark upon the land than did the carpetbagger. Fear of this growing industrialization as a menace to Southern identity was expressed decades ago by the Agrarians, says Woodward. But he believes that they were wrong in their premise that the Southern way stands or falls with the agrarian way because agrarianism in itself contains "no promise of continuity and endurance

¹C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 6.

for the Southern tradition."¹

He also seeks to demolish the Phillipsian preoccupation with racial consciousness as the central theme of Southern history. He admits, however, that it has proved more durable and widespread in appeal than agrarianism partly because "it is not tied to an ephemeral economic order" and partly because its adherents can have their cake and eat it, too, in a manner of speaking. They can enjoy the blessings of economic change for themselves and still cling to white supremacy, damning as intruders and meddlers such agents of change as would seek to alter the old rules pertaining to race.²

But since the second World War, contends Woodward, the old racial attitudes have proved more flexible than anyone could have believed. Barriers have been breached in area after area. He admits that "distinctive Southern racial attitudes will linger for a long time" in certain parts of the South, but points out that these attitudes have been so discredited and condemned by the rest of the country and the world that change is bound to come, especially where the younger generation is concerned.³

Woodward then cites certain Southern myths that have already been discredited--the plantation legend, for example, and the cavalier

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Ibid., p. 10.

³Ibid., p. 11.

legend. "But while these myths of Southern distinctiveness have been waning, national myths have been waxing in power and appeal"--and proving "far more sacrosanct and inviolate than the Southern myths."¹ Conformity to the American way of life has resulted, and the Southerner whose own myths have been uprooted, has been profoundly affected.

But the Southerner can be saved from pressures to excessive nationalism and conformity by his own history--not a "Southern brand of Shintoism . . . nor written history," but the collective experience of the Southern people.²

It is the fact of its unique historic experience of defeat that makes the South distinctive, says Woodward, and in this experience the Southerner can "find the basis for a continuity of his heritage and also make contributions that balance and complement the experience of the rest of the nation."³

For while the rest of the nation has experienced only affluence and success, the South has experienced poverty and defeat. The image of the American is also an image of innocence and moral complacency, but the South with its guilt-ridden history can participate in neither image.⁴

In another essay entitled "The Irony of Southern History,"

¹Ibid., p. 13.

²Ibid., pp. 15-16.

³Ibid., p. 16.

⁴Ibid., p. 21.

Woodward suggests that this distinctive Southern experience is more at one with that of the rest of mankind than is the usual American experience--and that the Southern experience can be of enormous value to America in understanding other nations and relating to them.¹

Among Southern historians the search for a "central theme" goes on--and probably will continue to do so. But it must be admitted that C. Vann Woodward, in propounding a distinctiveness formed by the collective experience of defeat, poverty, and guilt, has taken a giant step forward in explaining what makes the South "Southern."

¹C. Vann Woodward, "The Irony of Southern History" in The Burden of Southern History, p. 170.

CHAPTER III

THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION

Second only to race as a factor in Southern distinctiveness has been the area's continuing and unswerving devotion to fundamentalist religion--a brand of Protestantism chiefly concerned with evangelism and personal piety. This view, asserted by--among others--the eminent Southern historian Francis B. Simkins, is being echoed increasingly in other studies seeking to analyze Southern "different-ness." But it was Simkins who was earliest to espouse this thesis, maintaining that Southern tenacity in holding onto its traditional faith was second only to white supremacy as a means of conserving the ancient ways of the Southland.

The continuing prevalence of orthodox Protestantism in the twentieth century South seems to Simkins a likely explanation of why the section, in view of earth-shaking changes in industry, education, and transportation, has kept its identity as the most conservative portion of the United States.¹ A "sacred" society like the South tends to be highly resistant to change, Simkins finds, noting that as revolutionary changes in this country have tended to stop at the Potomac, so in Europe they have stopped with the Pyrenees because both

¹ Simkins, The South Old and New, p. 313.

Southerners and Spaniards have remained unrelentingly church-oriented.¹

In the early days of the Republic, of course, the tradition of Deism existed in the South, chiefly among the intelligentsia of the Eastern seaboard. A highly intellectualized religion, a product of the philosophical thinking of eighteenth century France, Deism was primarily associated with the Founding Fathers, most notably Thomas Jefferson. This was the era during which there flourished what W. J. Cash called the "Anglican spirit, meaning a fairly easy tolerance in religious matters . . . in sharp contrast to New England." This spirit, he wrote, "regarded emotion as a kind of moral smallpox."²

But what the Southerner required, said Cash, "was a faith as simple and emotional as himself . . . a faith to draw men together in hordes, to terrify them with Apocalyptic rhetoric, to cast them into the pit, rescue them, and at last bring them shouting into the fold of Grace." A faith, in short, that was anthropomorphic and concrete, rather than abstract, a faith "not of liturgy and prayer book but of primitive frenzy and blood sacrifice"--a faith that would bring drama and color into the often-drab lives of a dramatic and colorful people.³ "Rational" religion, after the early decades of the nineteenth century, no longer "suited" the South.

¹Simkins quoted in Samuel S. Hill, Jr., Southern Churches in Crisis, p. 12.

²Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Vintage Books, 1941), p. 55.

³Ibid., p. 58.

Thus it has traditionally been "Fundamentalist" territory, the Bible Belt, the land of Billy Sunday and Gypsy Smith, of holy rollers and snake handlers, of faith healers and tent revivals--and the Dayton "monkey trial."

(And spilling over from life into literature are personifications of the tradition--Erskine Caldwell's itinerant scoundrel-evangelist Seman Dye of The Journeyman, the sinister preacher-madman of Davis Grubb's Night of the Hunter, the younger, more rigid Gail Hightower of Faulkner's Light in August, and scores of others, moved to fanaticism by their own special understandings.)

Professor Simkins, interestingly enough, believed that the same psyche that motivates the religious groups thus personified is shared by upperclass Southern churchmen--that the differences between Holy Rollers and high church Episcopalians, if you will, are chiefly those of style, the difference between intense emotionalism and mannered restraint. In his view both are "fundamentally Southern, both dominated by orthodoxy, natural piety, hostility to rationalism and the spirit of free inquiry in Biblical matters."¹

They are both what the great mass of Southerners believe Christianity to be--"a medley of revivalistic and fundamentalistic strains, with a simplistic emphasis on the moment of salvation, with worship minimized, ethics a separate matter, dogmas limited, and any

¹Francis B. Simkins, A History of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 425.

real comprehension of classical fundamentalism absent."¹

This Southern religious distinctiveness has been summed up in cogent fashion in the recent work, The South in Continuity and Change: "Highly visible . . . structured to be a reinforcement of the culture . . . characterized by conservatism, emotionalism, theological fundamentalism, an uncritical, literal interpretation of the Bible, and a pietistic, particularistic morality."²

In an editorial for The American Mercury H. L. Mencken spoke, if less learnedly at least more bluntly, decrying the "Baptist and Methodist barbarism" below the Potomac and announcing that "no bolder attempt to set up a theocracy was ever made in this world and none ever had behind it a more implacable fanaticism."³ Certainly the activities of Methodist Bishop James Cannon whose efforts helped bring about a dry--if lawless--America did nothing to soothe the wrath of Mr. Mencken.

But Mencken was writing almost fifty years ago, nigh onto the day when the hotter fires of the fundamentalists were being extinguished--or at least moving underground. By the 1930's the more militant of them, "hopeless of victory in this world, were seeking refuge in the other--worldly premillennial sects, which grew rapidly in the

¹Hill, Southern Churches in Crisis, p. 25.

²Joseph H. Fichter and George L. Maddox, "Religion in the South, Old and New," in The South in Continuity and Change, ed. by John C. McKinney and Edgar Thompson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), p. v.

³H. L. Mencken, Editorial in The American Mercury, Vol. VII (January, 1926), p. 32.

1930's"--and have indeed continued to do so.¹

Yet Southern orthodoxy remained; and it is this phenomenon rather than the more militant fundamentalism of the sects that is examined in a significant book called Southern Churches in Crisis, by Samuel S. Hill, Jr. This work attempts to describe the distinctive historic role of the Southern church through modern times, when it is finding itself in a period of crisis.

Hill first describes the phenomenon which he terms "popular Southern religion" as a "peculiar variety of evangelistic Protestantism which has not flourished anywhere else in Christendom over a long period--a religious faith which has long enjoyed deep harmony with the culture which it embraces."² An insular brand of religion, Southern Protestantism's participation in world Christianity has been insignificant and its theological scholarship impoverished. This insularity, these divergencies from the mainstream, are apparent at any national meeting, Hill points out, because the Southern Church is simply speaking from a different orientation--and not only in the matter of race.³ There is simply a lag in the Southern branches of Christendom.

The so-called Social Gospel of the early twentieth century made little impact on the Southern system of religious thought because the system failed to see that involvement in the great social crises could

¹Tindall, Emergence of the New South, p. 207.

²Hill, Southern Churches in Crisis, p. xii.

³Ibid., p. 20.

be its responsibility. The South accepted both "Yahweh," the Hebrew tribal god, and the gentle Jesus, but it has consistently rejected Jesus the social prophet--and it has continued to be excited only by evangelism, by lapses from morality and by the question "What must I do to be saved?"¹

Consequently, the message of the Southern church has been for too long too closely identified with reactionary interests and values, with the economic status quo, with segregation and prohibition, with the conversion of individuals and the cultivation of piety.

Only in terms of institutional expansion has change appeared and here it has come merely in outward forms and techniques--modifications in appearance, not in substance.²

The total pervasiveness of revivalistic Protestantism is a post-Reconstruction phenomenon, although the movement itself had been in existence since the 1740's and the eruption of the Southern phase of the Great Awakening. In the North this concept of religion proved to be transitory; in the South it remained as the characteristic religious outlook.³ Immigration, which could have brought fresh concepts into the region, was highly limited; the Roman church, a different voice, made no impact on the Southern psyche except in certain areas of Louisiana. (Interestingly enough, however, two of the giants of

¹William McBride Dabbs, Who Speaks for the South? (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1964), p. 108.

²Hill, Southern Churches in Crisis, pp. xv, xvi.

³Ibid., p. 15.

twentieth century Southern literature, the late James Agee and the late Flannery O'Connor, were devout Catholics who wrote from a Roman orientation and whose works are richly permeated with Catholicism and Catholic symbolism.)

The real irony of the Southern religious picture, however, is the fact that the two most powerful Southern denominations, the Baptist and the Methodist, actually began as sects in protest against the establishment. A sect, of course, is by definition a group at odds with the prevailing cultural values, in contrast to a religious organization that accepts the social order and lives at peace with it. But the Southern sects, though they began as protest movements, have evolved into establishments themselves--despite the fact that they are inherently unsuited to be an established church.¹

Elsewhere, except in the South, these denominations are minority churches, lacking the privilege and power that have accrued to them in the American South. But here, they have so set the tone and so overshadowed other denominations that these other denominations, consciously or unconsciously, have veered from their traditional practices to conform more closely to those of the Big Two--e.g., the use of revivalism by Congregationalists, teetotaling among some Lutherans, and the nonliturgical practice of Presbyterianism are forms which are basically foreign to the traditions of these denominations.²

¹Hill, Southern Churches in Crisis, p. 15.

²Ibid., p. 33.

But Hill believes that this almost monolithic "establishment" may now be facing serious challenge. He sees its leadership increasingly unable to cope with the real problems of the day--and its particular message irrelevant and even irresponsible."¹

Until very recently the Southern "sacred society"--like its counterpart in Spain--has been, by definition, highly resistant to change. Until very recently new thoughts and fresh ideas which might tend to threaten the existent power structure simply had not penetrated.

But Southern religious life today is being increasingly marked by diversity and interaction. Though still distinctive, the South is now drawing closer to the national mainstream, and Southern mores are being tempered by confrontation with other American sub-cultures.²

Hill quotes James McBride Dabbs as saying that "the Southerner daily becomes more American." And for the first time he is seeing that in this matter of religion there are alternatives to the faith of his fathers. Young people are defecting, and others as well are leaving to search for enriched Christian meanings in the belief that the Christian faith must be richer and more meaningful than it has been represented as being.³

Edwin M. Poteat once noted, says Hill, the "solidarity of the Southern religious picture as opposed to the fluidity in the North and West"--the fact that the term "solid South" has reference to religious

¹Ibid., p. 4.

²Ibid.

³Hill, Southern Churches in Crisis, p. vii.

as well as political homogeneity.¹ It has been said, too, that "religion succeeds not because it's true but because it suits its worshipers."²

And certainly in generations past, the Southern religious style sublimely suited the Southern frontier situation, the rural style of life, and the prevailing cultural isolation. The church provided a social center, social stimulus for lonely folk; its revival meetings provided color and excitement for bleak, drab lives, and--most importantly--it provided undergirding for the social order and the continuance of the racial status quo. No definitive work has yet appeared concerning the role of religion among the blacks during the past. It has been assumed that Christianity among the Negroes has tended to keep them "docile," "in their place"--that it has imbued them with the virtue of endurance in this life in the hope of better things in a life to come. In recent years, of course, a new militancy has entered this traditional Christianity.

But times are changing--for Negro and white alike--and perhaps the distinctive religion that has tended to perpetuate the distinctiveness of the American South as a region may someday soon "not suit its worshipers." Perhaps its own practitioners will have shrunk away from the dichotomy in their souls that accepted the values and tenets of their revivalistic Protestantism--but ignored the

¹Ibid., p. 11.

²Ibid., p. 51.

precepts of brotherhood and condoned the racial cruelties and violence that flourished in the distinctive South.

CHAPTER II

THE SOUTHERN RAILROAD AS A SYMBOL

It is probable that at no period before or after 1850, when the Union was torn apart by the Civil War, did the South have a more powerful symbol of its unity and its destiny than the Southern Railroad. The railroad was the lifeblood of the South, the great artery that carried its goods and its people to the rest of the world. It was the symbol of the South's progress and its power, and it was the symbol of the South's unity and its destiny. The railroad was the great artery that carried the South's goods and its people to the rest of the world. It was the symbol of the South's progress and its power, and it was the symbol of the South's unity and its destiny.

Composed chiefly of iron, steel, and wood, the railroad was the great artery that carried the South's goods and its people to the rest of the world. It was the symbol of the South's progress and its power, and it was the symbol of the South's unity and its destiny. The railroad was the great artery that carried the South's goods and its people to the rest of the world. It was the symbol of the South's progress and its power, and it was the symbol of the South's unity and its destiny.

¹Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930).

²Other contributors to *I'll Take My Stand* included Donald Davidson, John Crowe Ransom, John Gould Fletcher, Lyle W. Larimer, Allen Tate, McKee Nolan Lytle, Robert Penn Warren, John Ronald Wade, Harry Allen Miles and Hays Young.

CHAPTER IV

DAYDREAM OF AN AGRARIAN CAMELOT

It is probable that at no period before or after 1930, when the nation was plunging headlong into the Great Depression, would the Agrarians of Vanderbilt University have received the serious attention accorded them, and the publication of I'll Take My Stand.¹ For at that moment in history, the industrial civilization which they so vociferously condemned was tottering in mortal peril. Standing resolutely apart from this civilization and its spirit of progress, the Agrarians more than any intellectually respectable group, clung to a fixed idea of Southern distinctiveness--an agrarian South of aristocratic tradition. They dwelt at Vanderbilt but they dreamed of dwelling in the El Dorado that was to them the ante-bellum South.

Composed chiefly of literary men, most of whom went on to careers of considerable distinction, the Agrarians also included historian Frank Owsley (who rediscovered that forgotten Southerner, the yeoman farmer) and political scientist H. C. Nixon.² Their ~~twelve-man~~ symposium, I'll Take My Stand, spelled out a South whose essence was

¹Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand; The South and the Agrarian Tradition (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930).

²Other contributors to I'll Take My Stand included Donald Davidson, John Crowe Ransom, John Gould Fletcher, Lyle H. Lanier, Allen Tate, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Robert Penn Warren, John Donald Wade, Henry Blue Kline and Stark Young.

the rural tradition, the aristocratic ideal, a proper concern for arts and manners, a definite class-and-caste system--in short, a sort of agrarian Camelot.

Posed against it was the twentieth century industrial society which to the Agrarians was the personification of evil. That it was reality as well, they chose to ignore, and in 1930 it could certainly be argued that the viability of an industrial society was in doubt.

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Southern agrarianism, of course, has a long and honorable tradition separate and apart from the Vanderbilt Agrarians. Jefferson's agrarian ideal set the pattern--and paved the way for such a theory of Southern distinctiveness as that delineated by historian Avery Craven the tradition of the English country gentleman. Craven saw Southern society consciously trying to imitate and preserve in a new land its remembered agrarian ideal from the old country.¹ To Craven this effort has colored the Southern land and its character throughout history. Historian William B. Hesseltine presents a somewhat similar view, seeing the South as the "last stronghold of the American traditions of the squire and the yeoman."²

But the Vanderbilt Agrarians were concerned with something quite different. They were not simply describing and explaining in

¹Simkins, A History of the South, p. 4.

²William B. Hesseltine and David L. Smiley, The South in American History, 2nd ed., (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 605.

the manner of Avery Craven; they were actively proselytizing for a way of life they deemed desirable. Reject the gospel of progress and the New South, they exhorted. Cling fast to the traditions of yore.

The introduction to the book depicts an agrarian society as one "in which agriculture is the leading vocation, a form of labor that is pursued with intellect and leisure."¹ It goes on to describe and support a Southern way of life against what might be called the American, or prevailing way, in an effort to persuade young Southerners to return to the support of Southern traditions.

"Religion," the twelve authors agree in this introduction, "can hardly expect to flourish in an industrial society . . . nor do the arts have a proper life under industry, with the general decay of sensibility which attends it. The amenities of life also suffer under the curse of industrial civilization."²

"Industrialism is an insidious spirit," writes John Crowe Ransom, "full of false promises . . ."³ But he fails to mention the false promises of an agrarian economy rife with sharecroppers and hookworm, plagued by illiteracy and grinding poverty. He admits ruefully that the South must be industrialized to a certain extent but cautions that Southerners "must resist the blandishments of the salesmen of industrialism," recognizing it for what it is--"a foreign

¹Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand, p. xix.

²Ibid., pp. xiv, iv.

³Op. Cit., p. 15.

invasion of Southern soil, which is capable of doing more devastation than was wrought when Sherman marched to the sea . . . It will be in order to proclaim to Southerners that the carpetbaggers are again in their midst. And it will be well to seize upon and advertise certain Northern industrial communities as horrible examples of a way of life we detest . . ."¹

The asperity of the Agrarians extended not only to industrialism and its alleged evils but also to the Negro. Writes Frank L. Owsley:

Negroes had come into the Southern colonies in such numbers that people feared for the integrity of the white race. For the Negroes were cannibals and barbarians, and therefore dangerous. No white man who had any contact with slavery was willing to free the slaves and allow them to dwell among the whites. Slaves were a peril . . . but free blacks were considered a menace too great to be hazarded.²

Robert Penn Warren must shudder when he reads his words of almost forty years ago:

The Negro radical wants to go to the same hotel, or he wants the right to go to the same hotel. The millenium which he contemplates would come to pass when the white man and the black man regularly sat down at the same table.³

In a more specific defense of agrarianism, Warren proposes that the "rural life provides the most satisfactory relationship of the two races which can be found at present."⁴ The Negro, he feels, is better

¹Ibid.

²Op. cit., p. 77.

³Op. cit., p. 254.

⁴Op. cit., p. 262.

off on the land.

Such excerpts as these, and the following one from John Gould Fletcher's contribution to the symposium, indicate why the Agrarians were termed Fascistic in some quarters. Writes Fletcher: "The inferior, whether in life or education, should exist only for the sake of the superior."¹

It is apparent that the Agrarians' tone generally is negative, more an excoriation of industrialism than a specific justification of agrarianism . . . more a paeon to the leisurely life and the "squirearchy" than a realistic appraisal of rural distinctiveness.

Not unexpectedly, criticism of the Agrarians' position arose. An immediate and down-to-earth one came from a peppery Gerald Johnson. "Have they never been in the rural South?" he asked. "Are they unaware of pellagra and hookworm, the two flowers of Southern agrarianism?"²

William Polk, a friendlier critic than most, called their book "a challenge to a monolithic culture of unredeemed materialism, based on the premise that the South, with its inherited institutions and its system of values, was a continuation of Western European culture, and that the North was the deviation."³

And Richmond C. Beatty pronounced in the Tennessee Historical

¹Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand, p. 119.

²Tindall, Emergence of the New South, pp. 578-79.

³William Polk, Southern Accent (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1953), p. 247.

Quarterly that the manifesto "precipitated more widespread controversy . . . than has attended any Southern book ever printed."¹

Much of the controversy originated at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where liberal proponents of change and progress were dreaming of a new Southern region. The particular dreams of the Agrarians were anathema to such men as Howard Odum and Rupert Vance; and yet the Agrarians' concern for Southern identity and distinctiveness has been said to have spurred these men on in their studies of the region--and to have been indirectly responsible for the publication of the monumental symposium, Culture in the South (1934).²

Journalist-historian W. J. Cash was yet another critic of the Agrarian position, but a temperate one. He described I'll Take My Stand as a "determined reassertion of the validity of the legend of the Old South, an attempt to revive and fully restore the identification of that Old South with Cloud-Cuckoo Town . . ."³

But, admits Cash, "the attempt was made with enormously intellectualized arguments." The Agrarians distrusted science and industry and democracy, they felt the need for the revival of values, and above everything a religious faith, which should again bind Western men, or at least some portion of them, into a unified whole.⁴

¹Tindall, Emergence of the New South, p. 579.

²Ibid., pp. 582-83.

³Cash, The Mind of the South, p. 390.

⁴Ibid.

Cash questions the Agrarians only for refusing to see the faults of their region--and for refusing to admit that "the diseases which presently afflict the South are not and cannot logically be made to be, as they maintain, solely the fault of the introduction of industrialization and commercialism . . ."¹

He concludes that although the Agrarians were guilty of encouraging smugness and sentimentality in many quarters, and even of giving these vices sanction as a sort of higher wisdom, they also helped puncture the smugness of progress and directed attention to the evils of laissez-faire industrialism.²

George Tindall describes another contribution of the Agrarian movement. As it had sprung originally from the Fugitive poets and their literary allies, so it returned to the literary world, paving the way for superior achievements by various of its adherents. He quotes critic Louis Rubin as writing that the Agrarians' image of the South provided "a rich, complex metaphor," through which they "presented a critique of the modern world," adding that "their vantage point was one from which there issued a literature conscious of the past within the present."³

Certainly many of the one-time Agrarians have enjoyed enormous literary prestige during the years since I'll Take My Stand.

¹Cash, p. 392.

²Cash, p. 394.

³Tindall, p. 582.

Poet-critic John Crowe Ransom has had extraordinary influence as father of the New Criticism. His disciples and his disciples' disciples have advanced his particular concepts and methods of teaching literature to numerous generations of college students all over America. Allen Tate, working in the same tradition, gained considerable renown as poet, novelist, critic, and teacher. And Robert Penn Warren has achieved as much success in the marketplace as in academia, most especially with his novels. One of them, All the King's Men, is very probably the best political novel to have been written by an American.

These three men, along with still-unreconstructed Agrarian Donald Davidson, came together for a reunion several years ago and reminisced about their days as Fugitive-Agrarians. Their recollections formed the basis of a book entitled Fugitives' Reunion: Conversations at Vanderbilt, May 3-5, 1956. They made several interesting observations: that I'll Take My Stand was as much a defense of poetry as of the South . . . that it was a sort of offense against the Yankee invasion that was overwhelming the South with commercialism . . . that essentially it represented a revolt against materialism and stereotyped forms of living and thinking.¹

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The Agrarians, except for Donald Davidson, have dispersed to various parts of the United States during the years since I'll Take

¹Rob Roy Purdy, ed., Fugitives' Reunion: Conversations at Vanderbilt (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1959), p. 183.

My Stand. Their distinctive South apparently served better as a myth about which to write than a land in which to live. One wonders how they view the South of today--a higher standard of living but more standardization; less illiteracy and less hookworm but less distinctiveness as a region; fewer farms with less farm population; and a growing urbanism that belies the whole concept of agrarian distinctiveness. Perhaps they realize that the Southern traits they hoped to preserve are not necessarily the products of an agrarian economy.

CHAPTER V

THE DISTINCTIVE SOUTHERN MIND

Wilbur Joseph Cash, Southerner, journalist, and historian, was a man obsessed all his days by the idea and fact of a particular geographic region--a man who actually spent his energies and his life in the production of a book which sought to explain that region and the factors that made it distinctive. The end result of his effort, of course, is the classic work The Mind of the South, a history that goes beyond history in an attempt to interpret the Southern "mind" in its totality--and is, in the words of Cash's biographer, "an audacious tour de force that comes off brilliantly."¹

Cash grew up in the culture which was to obsess him, and, by his own admission, was a "Southern sentimentalist" as a child. He had fantastic dreams of "fighting the Civil War over again and leading the charge on the cannon's mouth with a Confederate battle flag."² At Wake Forest College his interest in all things Southern deepened. His history professor, a Dr. C. C. Pearson of Virginia, liked to compare "the mind of Virginia" with "the mind of North Carolina." The concept fascinated young Cash, both then and later. Many of the articles he

¹Joseph L. Morrison, "The Obsessive Mind' of W. J. Cash," Virginia Quarterly Review, XLI (Spring, 1965), p. 266.

²Willard Thorp, A Southern Reader (New York: Knopf, 1950), p. 4.

wrote in the late 1920's and early 1930's for H. L. Mencken's American Mercury mirrored this fascination. They also appeared to be the work of an angry young man, often cynical and irresponsible: although James B. Duke, for example, was certainly no fit subject for canonization, only the Cash of the American Mercury would call him a "bloodbrother to Blackbeard" and accuse him of founding a university because "he wanted a Babbitt factory."¹

The angry young man had mellowed and found his subject by the time the mature Cash published The Mind of the South. Marked as it was by deep insights, compelling analysis, and memorable writing, it was instantly recognized as a classic. Time Magazine's anonymous reviewer wrote: "Anything written about the South henceforth must start where Cash leaves off." Other reviews were equally laudatory.

But Cash was exhausted, plagued by ill health, the victim of a growing despondency about the menace of Nazism. And on a summer day in 1941 he hanged himself in a hotel room in Mexico City. On that July 3 the Raleigh, North Carolina, News and Observer wrote in sorrow that "He seemed a man going a long way in his work in this land. And he decided not to go."

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To Cash, Southern distinctiveness was psychological; the South was a state of mind consisting of a "fairly definite mental pattern,

¹Wilbur J. Cash, "Buck Duke's University," The American Mercury, XXX (Sept., 1933), p. 102.

associated with a fairly definite social pattern."¹ The Southern psyche determined and colored the history of the region--and in its turn was intensified by the pressure of historical events. "The peculiar history of the South," wrote Cash, "has so greatly modified it from the general American norm that, when viewed as a whole, it is almost but not quite a nation within a nation."²

He believed that the essential mind of the South was present from Colonial times, existed through the ante-bellum period, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and with only slight modifications down through the years of the twentieth century.

What were some of the components of this mind? First, there was its simplicity . . . "perhaps as simple a type as Western civilization has produced in modern times."³ Cash quotes Henry Adams' well-known description of Rooney Lee, son of Robert E. Lee: "He was simple beyond analysis; so simple that even the simple New England student could not realize him."⁴

Second--since the simple man in general tends to be an individualist--there is the individualism of the Southern psyche . . . "perhaps the most intense individualism the world has seen since the Italian Renaissance."⁵

¹Cash, The Mind of the South, p. viii.

²Ibid., p. viii.

³Ibid., p. 30.

⁴Ibid., p. 102.

⁵Ibid., p. 32.

The planters, the yeoman farmers, and the crackers alike were "fiercely careful of their prerogatives of ownership . . . No man felt or acknowledged any primary dependence on his fellows."¹

An additional component of the Southern mind was hedonism--paradoxically combined with puritanism.

He [the Southerner] succeeded in uniting the two incompatible tendencies in his single person without ever allowing them to come into open and decisive combat . . . His combination of the two was without conscious imposture. One might say with much truth that it proceeded from a fundamental split in his psyche, from a sort of social schizophrenia. One may say more simply and more safely that it was all part and parcel of that naive capacity for unreality which was characteristic of him.²

Cash believed this capacity for unreality to be such a deeply-ingrained characteristic of the Southerner that it had caused him to develop certain highly illogical patterns of thought that have guided his destiny. In the context of this penchant for self-deception, Cash introduced two concepts, basically psychological in nature, which have influenced and colored Southern history. The first one he called the "proto-Dorian bond." It is a device by which the common white man "is made by extension a member of the dominant class and is therefore, for all time, the superior of the Negro and the loyal ally of the master class."³

He is actually given the sense of participating in the whole

¹Ibid., p. 34.

²Ibid., pp. 59-60.

³Ibid., p. 40.

aristocratic legend and of somehow being a part of it. He was made to feel that even "if your neighbor overshadowed you in the number of his slaves, you could outshoot him or outfiddle him, and in your own eyes, and in those of many of your fellows, remain essentially as good a man as he . . . because come what might, you would always be a white man."¹

And also:

There would nearly always be a fine gentleman to lay a familiar hand on his shoulder, to inquire by name after the members of his family, maybe to buy him a drink . . . and to come around eventually to confiding in a hushed voice that that damned nigger-loving scoundrel Garrison, in Boston--in short, to patronize him in such fashion that to his simple eyes he seemed not to be patronized at all but actually deferred to, to send him home, not sullen and vindictive, but glowing with the sense of participation in the common brotherhood of white men.²

This false sense of brotherhood, in Cash's view, kept the poor Southerner through the years from acting in his own best interests . . . resulted in the almost complete disappearance of economic and social focus on the part of the masses . . . and helped maintain a sort of "white planter supremacy."

Hinton Rowan Helper, writing a century before Cash, also understood this phenomenon. He recognized with bitterness that "the stupid . . . masses, the white victims of slavery . . . believe whatever the slaveholders tell them; and thus are cajoled into the notion that they are the freest, happiest, and most intelligent people in the world."³

¹Ibid., p. 40.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 69, quoted from H. R. Helper, The Impending Crisis.

Appreciation of this "proto-Dorian bond does indeed clarify much that is perplexing in Southern history: e.g. the common Southerner's continued defense of the slave system, his rabid support of secession and the Civil War, even the failure of unionization in the 1930's.

Just as significant a perspective through which to view Southern history is a second concept propounded by Cash and bearing the label "the savage ideal"--"that ideal whereunder dissent and variety are completely suppressed and men become, in all their attitudes, professions and actions, virtual replicas of one another."¹ This total stifling of the critical attitude explained for Cash why the region failed in earlier times to attain a productive intellectual culture: prior to the Civil War, the mental energies of several generations were poured into a sterile effort to defend an indefensible status quo and its peculiar institution.

After 1831 the disease of defensiveness assumed epidemic proportions, and the South continued its unhappy way toward strait-jacket conformity and total intolerance. "From a taboo on criticism of slavery, it was but an easy step to interpreting every criticism of the South on whatever score as disloyalty--to making such criticism so dangerous that none but a madman would risk it."²

Cash granted that in view of Southern individualism this situation seems paradoxical and even contradictory because the right of

¹Ibid., pp. 93-94.

²Ibid., p. 93.

dissent would seem the foundation on which individualism is built. He argued, however, that the individualism existing in the South was that of extremely simple men, "shaped by what were basically very simple and homogeneous conditions."¹ The result: men who were cut to a single pattern, fashioned by a world that bound them to a single focus.

The "savage ideal" was Cash's terminology; the idea behind it was not necessarily an innovation. At the same time that Cash was writing The Mind of the South, historian Clement Eaton was examining the same concept--and writing a book called Freedom of Thought in the Old South, which appeared in 1940.

Cash's biographer, Joseph Morrison, also calls attention to Clarence Cason of Alabama, a writing contemporary of Cash's "who in 1935 put a bullet through his brain three days before publication of his 90 Degrees in the Shade, thereby dramatically acting out his fear of a conformity that had in fact relaxed."²

Morrison notes that Cason, in his critical but much less ambitious book, yet touches on some of Cash's great themes, among them the South's hypersensitivity to criticism and the white supremacy issue. "He pilloried many evils that needed exposure," says Morrison . . . "but without achieving anything like the same impact [as Cash]."³

The impact made by W. J. Cash in 1941 is continuing. New generations of professors are assigning his book to new generations of

¹Ibid., p. 91.

²Joseph L. Morrison, W. J. Cash: Southern Prophet (New York: Knopf, 1967), p. 161.

³Ibid., p. 162.

students, and historians and writers are citing its findings in their own books and articles. A full-length biography of the one-time Charlotte News editorial writer appeared in 1967. Cash's place is assured as chronicler of the mind of the South. His book is generally recognized as the classic it is--and as a writer in Harper's Magazine wrote twenty-five years after the volume's publication: "Subsequent works on the same subject have almost been footnotes."¹

More than any other individual--be he historian, journalist, or man of letters--Wilbur J. Cash illumined the perplexing mind of the South and in so doing proved the thesis that the American South is a distinctive region composed of people who are possessed of an essential psychic unity.

He was a truth-seeker, this W. J. Cash, whose too-short life yielded one fine book as its only monument. Thoughtful men will continue to honor him in the realization that, like most truth-seekers, W. J. Cash gathered his crumbs and grains of truth at the cost of his bitter toil and agony.²

¹Edwin M. Yoder, "W. J. Cash a Quarter Century Later," Harper's, CCXXXV (Sept. 1965), 16.

²Morrison, W. J. Cash, pp. 173-74.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOUTH MILITANT

The concept of a South made distinctive by a penchant for militancy is advocated most notably by historian John Hope Franklin of the University of Chicago. Franklin, who happens to be a Negro, maintains that Southern militant attitudes developed quite early in the region's history as a response to life on the frontier, adaptation to the rural environment, the Indian danger, the fear of slaves, and also to an old-world concept of honor.¹ But what began merely as a penchant oftentimes assumed excessive proportions and became a trait in which the Southerner took enormous pride. Furthermore, as W. J. Cash points out, the South retained more than other areas those traits associated with the frontier. Duels, for example, "were as plentiful as blackberries in Mississippi" in 1844--and even at that early date young Southerners were already dreaming of military glory.²

Southern political institutions meanwhile were maturing slowly. The civilizing influence of cities was minimal because cities were few and the plantation system dominant. And built into the "hot-blooded, trigger-happy" people was a subtle disrespect for law,

¹John Hope Franklin, The Militant South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. viii.

²Ibid., p. 11.

the result of a concept of individual honor which Southerners placed even above wealth and learning . . . a concept that produced strong individualism and a feeling of personal sovereignty, but also discouraged the growth of strong law enforcement agencies.¹

"Your ante-bellum Southerner didn't think," says Cash. "He felt--and reacted violently."²

Foreign travelers in the America of the early nineteenth century would concur. The violence and savagery of young America was always noted in exaggerated form in the South. Frederick Law Olmsted, Mrs. Frances Trollope, Harriet Martineau, and many others wrote of the region with varying degrees of horror. Miss Martineau pronounced it "the most savage in the world."³

Southerners themselves gloried in their reputation for bellicosity. Their folk heroes were men of violence. When Preston Brooks of South Carolina beat Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner into insensibility with a walking stick, the South was delighted. Brooks was accorded a hero's welcome and "fragments of the stick were begged for as sacred relics."⁴

The South's one literary hero, Sir Walter Scott, was a novelist much given to accounts of battles and warfare, of tournaments and ladies fair and medieval chivalry. Such Southerners as were literate

¹Ibid., p. 35.

²Cash, The Mind of the South, quoted in Franklin, viii.

³Franklin, Militant South, p. 36.

⁴Ibid., p. 54.

took his idealized bellicosity much to heart, and as life sometimes imitates art, they proceeded to live to some extent in terms of it, even to the extent of staging medieval tournaments.¹ Mark Twain liked to claim that Sir Walter Scott had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.²

But the people who read Walter Scott's romances were a tiny minority. The vast majority of Southerners were illiterate or nearly so, and the prevailing illiteracy did nothing to dampen the fires of militancy. The form of education most in vogue, appropriately enough, was that to be found in the military schools which flourished more in the South than in any other region. The better ones, such as Virginia Military Institute and the Citadel, held their own with West Point, and Southern boys in great numbers attended not only these but also dozens of others less well-known, where they came under the spell of a military psychology.

Citizen soldiering, too, offered prestige, and a Southerner with his dreams of glory responded happily to the titles and uniforms provided by the militia, thus further diffusing the military psyche. By the time of the Civil War, the South was claiming with good cause to be fountainhead of the martial spirit in the United States.

¹Rollin G. Osterweis, Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 4-5.

²Mark Twain quoted in Franklin, Militant South, p. 194.

Southern states had turned the tide in battles, Southern officers had taught the art of warfare to thousands, and the Southern frontier had served as training ground for American soldiers.

But this same frontier, this frontier which is blamed for the development of the martial mind, was not unique to the South. Americans elsewhere, most particularly in the West, also lived in fear of Indian attacks and in rural isolation. Personal honor and individualism and a certain touchiness were also factors in the Westerner's make-up; and hunting, often touted as one of the few pleasures of the poor rural Southerner, was certainly enjoyed by his counterpart in other regions of the country.

But there was one phenomenon peculiar to the South which tended to undergird and provide a rationale for Southern militance; the institution of slavery. Its very existence called for a militant mentality; the entire master-slave relationship was predicated on a psychology of victor and vanquished. Slavery, quite obviously, must result not only in reliance on force, but also in the brutalization of both master and slave and in a life situation where the lowest and most savage instincts of the "master" race could be quite legitimately called into play. With such dark horror at its core, the veneer of civilization so carefully maintained was thin indeed. And after 1831 the mental pattern of violence was intensified, with the stifling of all criticism of the peculiar institution.¹

¹Franklin, The Militant South, p. 70.

But Southern militancy failed to disappear with the disappearance of slavery and the termination of the Civil War. Dueling, the Ku Klux Klan, and night riders continued to be common phenomena of the Southern scene. Between 1900 and 1930 ninety per cent of all U. S. lynchings occurred in the South.¹ Even today the murder capital of the United States is invariably a Southern city.

John Hope Franklin is by no means the only observer who sees militancy as a central theme in Southern history. Alabama journalist John Temple Graves examined the predilection of Southerners for bellicosity in his book The Fighting South, with special reference to the years just preceding World War II.

The Southern penchant for militancy was especially strong in those years. The isolation so prevalent in other parts of the land was never a factor in the South. Quite the opposite. In a Gallup Poll of early October 1941 it was found that eighty-eight per cent of Southerners compared with seventy per cent of the American people as a whole felt that beating Germany was more important than keeping out of war.² There was also a strikingly large proportion of volunteer enlistments by Southerners before the draft was organized.

Numerous explanations were offered for this belligerency. Journalist Dorothy Thompson said that it was poverty--that Southerners had less to lose and were therefore readier to take a chance. Other

¹Ibid., p. x.

²John Temple Graves, The Fighting South (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1943), p. 5.

less flattering explanations were advanced. "Southern ignorance," said Erskine Caldwell. "Southern credulity," said H. L. Mencken, "the usual susceptibility of the Southerner to English propaganda."¹

"Have-not people are more inclined to belligerency than have people," wrote Jonathan Daniels. "The comfortable in possession don't want to fight."²

Other explanations included the South's Anglo-Saxon heritage . . . and the climate, believed by many to breed violence . . . and the defense psychology engendered by defeat in war . . . or the simple habit of dangerous living. "Living dangerously," says Graves, "may not be a philosophy with the average Southerner, but it is a habit!"³

Howard Odum, while agreeing that there is no one explanation for the greater militancy of the South, mentioned several others: "One explanation is the South's ideology of patriotism and loyalty . . . Much of our belligerency is against those who do not believe as we do . . . Another elemental factor may be the continuing frontier culture of the South . . . and, always, the spirit of war and fighting and defense . . . [and] the fact that the South still retains the ideology of honor and a certain type of chivalry."⁴

But whatever the complex of reasons, it is obvious that they

¹Graves, The Fighting South, p. 5.

²Ibid., pp. 6-7.

³Ibid., p. 16.

⁴Ibid., p. 17.

persist today. Opposition to the Viet Nam war has come from areas other than the South; Southern students by and large have supported the war--in striking contrast to the younger generation elsewhere.

The centrality of violence and militancy in Southern history has been explored in depth by the writers of the Southern Renaissance who utilized it both as symbol and as naturalistic material. The so-called Southern Gothic school is too well-known to require any belaboring of the point, and only a few examples from some of the more eminent writers will serve to illustrate it. Robert Penn Warren seems so totally pre-occupied with violence in the Southern character that he has been said to regard it as central. His books are invariably peopled with savage impassioned characters living in a Gothic world of bizarre horrors: the beheading that occurs in World Enough and Time, the monstrous murder of the Negro slaves in his narrative poem Brother to Dragons (a true horror story, incidentally, wherein Thomas Jefferson's nephews chop their victims to death.)

The plays of Mississippi-born Tennessee Williams are also filled with violence of every imaginable variety--rape in "Streetcar Named Desire," castration in "Sweet Bird of Youth," cannibalism in "Suddenly Last Summer," a hero devoured by dogs in "Orpheus Descending."

And William Faulkner, the greatest of them all, will be remembered not only as a spinner of tales and chronicler of the Southern soul--but as a master of violence. Whether symbolically or literally, his novels, one and all, are concerned with murder and rape, incest and suicide, miscegenation and lynching--every sin of violence known to the

mind and heart of man. Whether symbolically or literally, William Faulkner was a purveyor of violence--but also the novelist above all others who endeavored to understand and illumine the untamed and violent heart of the distinctive South.

Perhaps one must believe with Louis D. Rubin, Jr., that the plight of the dark and tragic land is truly symbolized by Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen who attempted to build a dynasty and civilization on the blood and sweat of bondsmen--and who crashed to his own doom as a result.¹

¹Louis D. Rubin, Jr., The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 52.

CHAPTER VII

THE VIEW FROM THE EDITORS' DESKS

Given objectivity and compassion, the men who edit a region's newspapers are by and large peculiarly fitted to probe its psyche. In the past forty years the South has been fortunate to have produced numbers of such editors--men who understood the region but were sufficiently in tune with the American mainstream to lead and prod a recalcitrant people into acceptance of certain realities. These men not only observed the history of their region, they helped make it as they wrote about it--and in their writings they frequently sought to isolate that elusive phenomenon of the distinctive South. Recent years have seen the appearance of several books by various of these concerned editors as they sought to analyze and explain their perplexing region.

Greensboro, North Carolina's late William T. Polk saw the South as a land with a penchant for hyperbole and the romantic. He distinguished between what he called the Surviving South and the Industrialized South, a distinction that grows ever more valid to the Southerner living today in this region. The South, said Polk, is essentially an easy-going rural land with a long-standing suspicion of industry and its values. It wants, in fact, only the fruits of

industry, not the tree.¹

Polk sees the Surviving South as being characterized by certain human values (such as leisureliness and warm neighborliness) and voices the hope that they will survive industrialization.

Former Little Rock (Arkansas) editor Harry Ashmore is highly doubtful that they will survive. He contends that Dixie already has retained its separate identity longer than any other region--but that today economics is changing the face of this region. He presents three reasons to explain why "separateness" has lasted as long as it did, reasons which are in reality three peculiar institutions: an agrarian economy characterized by sharecropping; a one-party political system which in essence was a device for disfranchising the Negro; and legalized segregation.² In Ashmore's view economics is responsible for the demise of these institutions--and also for the demise of a Dixie which must now find its future in the national pattern.

With apt use of Faulknerian allusion, Ashmore memorably and humorously pinpoints the exact moment of the demise of Dixie as follows: "When a rich Negro leaves behind a widow with sufficient holdings to justify one of the Snopes boys marrying her for her money!"³

But in a more serious vein he echoes Polk, and W. J. Cash as well, when he says that "I can only hope that in the new time . . . we

¹Polk, Southern Accent, p. 244.

²Ashmore, An Epitaph for Dixie, p. 15.

³Ibid., p. 132.

in the South can carry over traces of the old qualities of humor and grace that once distinguished most of us, proud or humble, black or white."¹

In 1959 another Southern editor, the late Ralph McGill of Atlanta, tried his hand at analyzing his native region. "The American South," he said, "possessed a stubborn, often unjustified pride; it was easy-going and yet violent when it chose to be; it shared a common mystique in which there is grandeur and pathos and a note of falseness too." Full of complexities, it was yet "fluid as quicksilver, rigid and cruel in its adamant injustices and wrongs . . . and yet soft and merry."²

McGill agreed with Ulrich B. Phillips that the uniqueness of the South was white supremacy, but he felt that in the fullness of time this negative concept is being dissipated. Young generations of Southerners, he predicted, will have other yardsticks of regional identification. They will not wear their skin as a badge. They have seen Southernism equated with mobs burning buses, with the police dogs of Birmingham, and the screaming mothers of New Orleans, and seeing these things, they will be extremely unlikely to assume the weight of the old myths.

The young Southerner will want none of the heritage that has made his region so poor and so burdened that all its public institutions

¹Ibid., p. 15.

²Ralph McGill, The South and the Southerner (Boston: Atlantic-Little Brown, 1959), p. 6.

have lagged behind those of other parts of the country. Past generations of Southerners have all known scarcity and want; the young Southerner wants a different economy.

The voice of the Chamber of Commerce is heard in the land, says McGill--and it is louder and more significant than the voices of the political demagogues. Economics as well as civilization and morality have become bored with segregation. So now as the region is losing its fateful uniqueness, based on a subordinate position for one-third of its people, the best human qualities of both races can move into the mainstream of American life and the promise of equal opportunity.

McGill quotes the late novelist Carson McCullers on the nature of this uniqueness. Speaking of the special collective guilt of Southerners, Miss McCullers wrote:

Southerners are the more lonely and spiritually estranged I think, because we have lived for so long in an artificial social system that we insisted was natural and right and just when all along we knew it wasn't. The fact that we bolstered it with laws and developed a secular liturgy and sacraments for it is evidence of how little we believed our own deceptions.¹

The view of former Birmingham (Alabama) editor John Temple Graves--that of a fighting South imbued with a spirit of militance--is treated at considerable length elsewhere in this paper. Mention is also made of the views of Jonathan Daniels, editor of the Raleigh (North Carolina) News and Observer, who, along with Howard Odum's regional sociologists, placed considerable emphasis on the fact of

¹Ibid., p. 217.

Southern poverty. Deploing the out-migration of educated Southerners, Daniels was pleading for diversity in industrial and agricultural development as early as 1938 in his book A Southerner Discovers the South.

Their distinguished fellow editor Hodding Carter of Greenville, Mississippi, sees the South as a land of paradoxes which he spells out in his recent work First Person Rural. The South, he says, is the longest-settled region of the United States . . . but it is also the nation's No. 1 frontier. It is the most homogeneous of the regions . . . but it contains the nation's only truly unassimilated minority. Its people are imbued with a strong love of the land . . . but nowhere are there more landless farm workers, nor a more wasteful use of the soil. More Southerners than Northerners attend church and place emphasis on churchliness . . . but in no part of America is there less belief in the concept of the brotherhood of man.

The South is a land of individualists . . . but nowhere is thinking more regimented. It is a land justly famed for kindly hospitality . . . but few places are so suspicious of strangers. Southerners are proverbially gentle . . . but Southern statistics of violence are the nation's highest. Southern patriotism is unsurpassed in terms of volunteers in the armed services and heroism in battle . . . but no area in the country has been so defiant of national authority. The South has more "have-nots" than any region of the country . . . but fewer Communists. And there is no region that takes its politics more intensely . . . but none where fewer people

vote.¹

Carter also labels Southerners as a writing people, pointing out that there are eight publishing authors in his town of Greenville (population 35,000). "We have made our literature a means of expressing our sense of being a people apart," he says.²

Why writing? Because there have been no centers offering training in the other artistic disciplines--and because the written word is the one creative medium to which primitive rural people respond.

A complete change of pace is seen in the writings of former Richmond (Virginia) News Leader editor James J. Kilpatrick, who along with Louis D. Rubin Jr., is co-author of The Lasting South: Fourteen Southerners Look at Their Home. The contributors to this volume seem more conscious of past glories than of present realities and they take as their text the thesis that the South's identity is worth preserving. The identity they seem to have in mind, however, sounds suspiciously like the South that the Vanderbilt Agrarians would recapture--complete with white supremacy. Our old values, says Rubin, are being threatened by urban industrial values. We need to oppose centralized government, says Kilpatrick, or lose our conservative rural tradition.

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Other Southern editors, most certainly, have made their

¹Hodding Carter, First Person Rural (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1963), pp. 58-60.

²Ibid., p. 66.

contributions--in terms both of analyses of the region and of efforts to prod their particular communities forward into the sunlight of the twentieth century. One thinks of editors of papers both great and small . . . the earlier Virginius Dabney of the Richmond (Virginia) Times-Dispatch and Mark Ethridge, formerly of the Louisville (Kentucky) Courier-Journal . . . and also of a young North Carolinian named Horace Carter who won a Pulitzer Prize for fighting the Ku Klux Klan in a place called Tabor City . . . a Mississippi phenomenon known as the Petal Paper which survived despite its enlightened racial views . . . and most memorably of all, Harry Golden's inimitable Carolina Israelite, which published for years in Charlotte, North Carolina, landing numerous body blows to the then-sacrosanct institution of segregation in a highly humorous fashion.

James J. Kilpatrick, to be sure, has his counterparts and his supporters in communities all over the South. But if there seems today less chance that their particular brand of Southern distinctiveness will prevail, it will be due at least in small measure to various of their confreres of the Fourth Estate whose vision faced forward rather than backward.

CHAPTER VIII

QUEST OF THE POETS

It was an historian, the late James G. Randall, who commented that "the poets have done better in expressing the oneness of the South than the historians in explaining it."¹ And certainly the "poets" have tried. C. Vann Woodward writes that "they have enriched our consciousness of the past in the present."² And just as they are distinguished by this unique historical consciousness, they are also strongly imbued with a sense of place. They are Southern Writers--more distinctively so than were the New England poets of a century ago, the Midwestern authors of a half-century past, or even the urban Jewish novelists of our own time.

As cultural history goes, this is a comparatively new phenomenon. The eighteenth century South was firmly wedded to a European cultural tradition, in matters religious, philosophical and literary--and much more so than was the North. This situation reversed itself in the nineteenth century; it was the North that established and maintained cultural contacts abroad. The South lost touch with the great outside world of ideas and literature--always excepting the works of Sir Walter Scott--and its resulting provincialism was to

¹Grantham, ed., The South and the Sectional Image, p. 19.

²Woodward, The Burden of Southern History, p. 39.

endure for over a century.¹

The South's own myth-making began in the 1830's--most especially that of the Myth of the Plantation, along with lesser myths of noblesse oblige and cultivated leisure. They were brought into being and nurtured by scores of obscure writers such as John Pendleton Kennedy, Augustus B. Longstreet, William A. Caruthers, and Nathaniel Beverley Tucker.² Only William Gilmore Simms of these Southern writers possessed the talent and insight to "tell it like it was." Simms had a "marked tendency to view his Tidewater planter critically or satirically, and to see his world as tragically flawed. . ."³ And he was not alone in this tendency; William R. Taylor points out that "few Southerners really believed in the Cavalier--only in the need for him."⁴

Yet Simms was to play a thankless role in Southern literary history. Although he was known and respected in New York and London, he was ignored by the people of his native Charleston--the only group, unhappily, that he really cared about pleasing.⁵

But whether it were Simms or Kennedy or Tucker writing in the genre of the plantation myth . . . or Caruthers and Longstreet mining

¹William R. Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character (New York: G. Braziller, Inc., 1961), p. 18.

²Taylor, Cavalier and Yankee, p. 67.

³Ibid., p. 151.

⁴Ibid., p. 323.

⁵Simkins, A History of the South, p. 182.

the rich vein of Southern frontier humor, these writers were primarily concerned with locale, not human beings as such--and consequently they never achieved true greatness.

It is common knowledge that the best minds produced in the nineteenth century South were channeled into the realm of politics rather than the fields of imaginative literature, or ideas in general. As Cash put it, "The intellectual and aesthetic culture of the Old South was a superficial and jejune thing, borrowed from without and worn as a political armor and a badge of rank; and hence . . . not a true culture at all."¹ How could it be otherwise when Cash's Southerners, imbued with his Savage Ideal, had abdicated their right to dissent, when after 1831 the most powerful, the most subtle, the most educated intellects were devoting their abilities to a defense of the indefensible--their region's "peculiar institution"?

The institution was shattered and the war was lost, but it is not surprising that the decades after the war saw a literary return to the Myth of the Plantation, saccharine and sentimental but seemingly possessed of indestructible vitality--well illustrating Cash's theory of the Southern penchant for unreality. As Robert Penn Warren put it: "In defeat the solid South was born. At its moment of death the Confederacy entered upon its immortality."²

¹ Cash, The Mind of the South, p. 97.

² Arthur Link and Rembert W. Patrick, Writing Southern History, Essays in Historiography in Honor of Fletcher M. Green (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 385.

In Virginia the myth was helped along by the romantic writings of Thomas Nelson Page, famed chronicler of the aristocratic tradition and author of In Ole Virginia. But in North Carolina another Page was writing, a quite different man. Walter Hines Page was urging his region to face forward rather than backward, to live with reality rather than myth. Thomas Nelson Page was venerated in his day, and Walter Hines Page was practically run out of North Carolina, but it was the latter man who helped set the stage for future intellectual and literary developments that would be grounded in reality and keyed to progress.¹

The generations of writers which were to follow would be very different from Thomas Nelson Page---still preoccupied with locale but much less Romantic and suffused with a very real sense of history. Louis D. Rubin points out that Southern writers born in the last decade of the nineteenth century grew up with history; history had "happened" to their parents.² Later they saw the world in which they had grown up changing to another kind of world---and they developed a sort of two-way vision as they looked back to a time-past that had a different quality from time-present.

Or, as Allen Tate describes the writers of that historical watershed, "we had . . . a double focus, a looking two ways, which

¹Symbolic significance of the two Pages pointed out by Edwin Mims in The Advancing South (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926) p. 24.

²Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Southern Literary Renaissance," in Grantham, ed., The South and the Sectional Image, p. 149.

gave a special dimension to the writers of our school." The peculiar historical perspective of that generation, he said, made possible the "curious burst of intelligence that we get at a crossing of the ways, not unlike, on an infinitesimal scale, the outburst of poetic genius at the end of the sixteenth century . . ."¹

Tate was too modest. This Southern Literary Renaissance of which he spoke and in which he played a significant role was not infinitesimal--it has more accurately been called a "phenomenon unparalleled in American history."² It broke upon the American cultural scene with suddenness. As late as 1917 H. L. Mencken was attacking the artistic aridity of the South in his essay "The Sahara of the Bozart." Only a few years later the situation called for reassessment. With the coming of World War I, the South had re-entered the American nation and the world--and in so doing it was gaining a new perspective on itself, a new awareness of its own values. Books such as Main Street and Winesburg, Ohio were striking a responsive chord in a region of small towns.³ And Southerners themselves were beginning to write.

In Richmond both Ellen Glasgow and James Branch Cabell were producing novels that were to win them praise from serious northern critics. Patricians both, their work yet differed greatly. Glasgow tended to social realism, reflecting her region, its social history,

¹Tindall, Emergence of the New South, p. 287.

²John M. Bradbury, Renaissance in the South, A Critical History of the Literature 1920-1960 (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1963), p. 7

³Ibid., p. 8.

and most particularly the lot of its women. Cabell, ever the Romantic, escaped into his medieval chronicle of the mythical kingdom of Poictesme. George Tindall, however, writes of it that "remote as Poictesme seemed, its genesis was in the Virginia of Cabell's youth. The growth of his myth . . . bore a striking resemblance to the rise of the myth of the Confederacy . . ."¹

At Vanderbilt University the Fugitive poets, forerunners of the Agrarians, were issuing a little magazine called The Fugitive and through it proclaiming the existence of what Tindall calls "the most influential group in American letters since the New England Transcendentalists." Ironically enough, however, in view of their later work, "they were self-consciously cosmopolitan in attitude and opposed to the promotion of Southern literature as such."²

At Chapel Hill, with the advent of the Carolina Playmakers, the whole concept of regional drama was coming into being under the leadership of "Proff" Frederick Koch. "Write what you know," he preached. "If you observe the locality with which you are most familiar, and interpret it faithfully, it will show you the way to the universal."³ His students took his words literally. In his early classes were Paul Green, later a Pulitzer Prize winner in drama and pioneer in the field of outdoor historical pageants, and also that

¹Tindall, Emergence of the New South, p. 291.

²Ibid., p. 296.

³Ibid., p. 304.

giant of Southern literature, Thomas Wolfe, who wrote about himself-- but more explicitly than any of his peers tried to be an "American" novelist.

The Nashville group and the Chapel Hill group, each in its own way, was deeply concerned with the South, its identity and values; but the orientation of the two groups was so different that conflict was inevitable. At Chapel Hill were based the liberal proponents of progress and change--in both literature and society. Their literary approach was Romantic, for which the Nashville Fugitives affected scorn. With an emphasis on classicism and the need for authority and discipline, the Vanderbilt writers stressed the preservation of a traditional Southern order.¹

And their group retained sufficient cohesion "to form a central directorate that promulgated the orthodox canons of the Southern Literary Renaissance."²

The twenties also saw literary stirrings in Charleston, with the publication of Julia Peterkin's Pulitzer Prize-winning Scarlet Sister Mary (1928) and Du Bose Heyward's Porgy (1925) and Mamba's Daughters (1928). The Tennessee Hill people were satirized in the work of T. S. Stribling.³ By the end of the decade three of the great works of the literary renaissance were published, Wolfe's Look Homeward Angel, and

¹Bradbury, Renaissance in the South, p. 17.

²Tindall, Emergence of the New South, p. 650.

³Ibid., pp. 308, 313.

Faulkner's Sartoris and The Sound and the Fury, with which he began his Yoknapatawpha County saga.

By 1930 Howard Mumford Jones was to write that "one may reasonably argue that the South is the literary land of promise today."¹

The Sahara of the Bozart had become the promised land. Succeeding decades saw the emergence of dozens of writers, writers of excellence, all of them concerned with Southern themes and the nature of their land. Faulkner continued to construct his mythical Yoknapatawpha, his microcosm of the South--and of the world beyond. Erskine Caldwell created a Southern Gothic world of comic grotesques that won him fame and best-sellerdom. Wolfe fought against his Southernness but his unrestrained rhetoric belied his effort.

Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, and Stark Young with his So Red the Rose, exemplified the agrarian virtues, the responsible moral codes.² Also notable is Robert Penn Warren, who writes of violence but yet comes closest, Woodward says, "to approaching an historical subject after the manner of an historian."³ Women writers such as Eudora Welty and Katharine Anne Porter, and Carson McCullers with her themes of loneliness and isolation, won world renown as Southern stylists and craftsmen. And, meanwhile, Margaret Mitchell spread the Myth of the Plantation around the world with the runaway success of her

¹Howard Mumford Jones, "Is There a Southern Renaissance?" Virginia Quarterly Review, VI (1930), 185.

²Bradbury, Renaissance in the South, p. 62.

³Woodward, The Burden of Southern History, p. 34.

Gone With the Wind.

In 1935 Allen Tate remarked that the Renaissance was over--but it would appear that his obituary was premature. The Renaissance showed every sign of vitality and self-renewal as new literary lights continued to appear on the horizon--James Agee, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Randall Jarrell, Peter Taylor, William Styron, Flannery O'Connor among many, many others.

Indeed the South by 1945 was far advanced toward "if indeed it had not already seized, triumphant possession of the American literary world . . . and the New Critics (the old Fugitives) were moving toward their conquest of the classroom from the historical scholars."¹

As one critic put it, "The South spent its first years creating its myths, a few years defending them, and its most recent years utilizing them as the subject matter for literature."² The process of utilization continues.

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Why the Southern Literary Renaissance? Why did this brilliant literary outpouring emerge from the area of the United States which is the most economically deprived, the most undereducated, the least literate?

Numerous reasons have been advanced, many of them quite obvious--the Southerners' love of story-telling for its own sake, his respect

¹Tindall, p. 686.

²Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs, ed., Southern Renaissance (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1953), p. 283.

for words and rhetoric, his receptivity to the concrete and the dramatic.

Also of tremendous importance is the wealth and drama of Southern subject matter; the richness of its characters . . . the aura of myth surrounding a tragic history of defeat in battle, a lost culture, a fall from glory . . . and also a present that sharply dramatizes the impact of change on a land still facing two ways.

Bradbury explains the literary upsurge in terms of the South's continuing sense of the past, the agrarian tradition, a heritage of family solidarity, pressures of social change, and an atmosphere of literary consciousness.¹

Louis D. Rubin, Jr., attributes much of the power of the modern Southern writer to the fact of his alienation. The literary man of the nineteenth or early twentieth century, Rubin says, was not an exile; he wrote as an integrated member of the community. But later in the twentieth century he tended to be alienated, cut off--spiritually if not geographically.² And viewing his land from afar, as it were, his perspectives were changed and he wrote with added intensity and depth.

Cleanth Brooks looks deeper and finds elements in the Southern cultural scene which he believes elicit a literary response--a concreteness of human relations which is not possible in metropolitan

¹Bradbury, p. 196.

²Louis D. Rubin, Jr., The Faraway Country, p. 7.

areas, the polarities everywhere confronting one; a pervading sense of community, and a pervading sense of tragedy.¹

Hugh Holman further explores the phenomenon that Brooks refers to as "polarities." There is, he says, a dichotomy at the heart of the Southern riddle--polished manners alongside violence; intense individualism alongside intense group pressures toward conformity; patriotism alongside law flouting. The reconciliation of such opposites, he proposes, is the function of the poet.²

The Southern writer, he continues, is showing man possessed by a tragic sense of guilt--of which the Negro is the cause and symbol.³ The writers of the literary renaissance were the first actually to confront this tragic guilt, born of the region's history. And this confrontation, this act of brooding over the past-as-legend, has resulted in some of the greatest, the most significant literary works in American cultural history--a contribution that alone would render the South distinctive.

"Out of the cauldron of the Southern experience," writes Holman, "the Southern writer has fashioned tragic grandeur. Possibly no other Southern accomplishment will equal it in importance."⁴

Foremost among Southern writers, as he is foremost among those

¹Cleanth Brooks, "Regionalism in American Life," Journal of Southern History, XXVI (Feb. 1960), p. 40.

²Hugh Holman, "The Southerner as American Writer" in Charles G. Sellers, ed., The Southerner as American, p. 180.

³Sellers, p. 191.

⁴Ibid., p. 199.

utilizing the themes of tragic guilt and Southern identity, is, of course, William Faulkner. "The novels of Faulkner," wrote Robert Penn Warren, "told you that there was, if you looked a second time, an intense, tormented and brutal, but dignified and sometimes noble reality in Southern-ness."¹

This is certainly so in the Southern-ness represented by his Sartoris family. In Faulkner's cosmology the spiritual geography is clearly drawn, with battle lines between the Sartorises who symbolize tradition, the human values, and ethical responsibility . . . and the Snopeses, symbolizing amorality, avariciousness, and animal naturalism. The war is waged--but the noble Sartorises are doomed to fall in defeat for they are irrevocably cursed. And like the Sartorises (and the Sutpen and Compson families as well), the South also is "cursed and doomed by slavery and must find its own expiation."²

Along with tragic guilt, Faulkner's novels show an almost-Biblical concern with the sins of the fathers visited on their children--most especially in his great Absalom! Absalom! In it, writes Louis Rubin, "the South is symbolized by Thomas Sutpen who attempted to build a civilization on the enslavement of human beings."³ With no capacity for love, no compassion for his fellow humans, Sutpen single-mindedly forges ahead to build in Yoknapatawpha a great dynasty on the sweat of his bondsmen. The novel achieves the sweep of Greek tragedy with

¹Robert Penn Warren, Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), Introduction.

²Rubin and Jacobs, p. 193.

³Rubin, The Faraway Country, p. 52.

the fall of the house of Sutpen, when all that remains of his dynastic dream is the "half-witted, part-Negro great-grandson howling through the ashes" of his burned house.¹

To Faulkner the fall of Sutpen and the entire saga of Yoknapatawpha County is "the epic story of the South's spiritual suicide."²

It has been said that all the great epics of world literature have dealt with the fall and defeat of a departed civilization--which renders the South proper subject matter for an American epic.

To C. Vann Woodward the very fact of defeat is the distinctive theme of Southern history; it may also be a chief reason for the magnificent body of literature produced in the past four decades by Southern writers. Because of the work of these writers, Woodward believes, the South's distinctive heritage will survive.³

The themes that have inspired these major writers, he says, have not been the flattering myths or the romantic dreams of the South's past. They have been, instead, "the somber realities of hardship and defeat and evil and the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself." In utilizing such themes, says Woodward, the major Southern writers have brought to realization for the first time the powerful literary potentials of the South's tragic experience and heritage.⁴

¹Tindall, p. 656.

²Hesseltine and Smiley, The South in American History, p. 601.

³Woodward, The Burden of Southern History, p. 24.

⁴Ibid.

The Southern Literary Renaissance has placed Southern writers in the vanguard of national letters, Woodward believes, and "has assured that their works will be read as long as American literature is remembered."¹

¹Ibid.

CONCLUSION

THE HOPED-FOR DISTINCTIVENESS

A historically-distinctive minority problem . . . a distinctive approach to religion . . . a distinctive literature and psychology . . . a distinctive tradition of violence . . . a tragic and guilt-ridden history and its continuing relevance. Each of these factors has its own significance. In combination they constitute something greater than the sum-total of their parts--the Southern mystique, a very special mystique, well-seasoned with cultural distinctives that add color and flavor to the growing standardization of American life.

And although Howard Zinn could write as late as 1964 that "the mystique that has always surrounded the South is beginning to vanish," how, really could it? Zinn attributes its disappearance to the breakdown of segregation, to the beginnings of human contact between the races, which he feels is "dispelling former mysteries."¹

There is certainly validity in this observation, but this may be a narrow view of Southern distinctiveness. The simple fact of segregation per se was never the total essence of this complex land. We have noted myriad skeins that form its richly textured fabric.

Henry Savage, Jr., may write that "within the span of lives now in being, it [the South] will be but a geographic section of the

¹Zinn, The Southern Mystique, Introduction.

nation."¹ But there are other historians who see more deeply, visualize more optimistically, and philosophically, the distinctive role the South has yet to play in American history.

Leslie W. Dunbar writes that "the mind of the white South is changing through the action of the black South and the accommodating reaction of the white South. A new South is shaping itself through history-making and not through history consciousness."

The way it will survive, he continues, "is to do something that would matter to the world, and that is to become a rarity--a bi-racial community at peace with itself, by integrating the Negro into its political processes."²

It is the hope of Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "that in our time loyalty to the South may take the form of opposition to the old Southern credo (of a segregated society)."³ And Charles L. Black, Jr., of Yale writes of his "dream of Southern whites and Negroes, bound in a special bond of common tragedy may come to recognize kinship."⁴

And though private white schools spring up and black separatists struggle for segregation all over again and the pessimists mutter direly of blood in the streets, there are thousands of men of good will who will accept Howard Odum's insistence on the old sympathy between the Southern white and the Negro.

¹Savage, Seeds of Time, p. 274.

²Dunbar quoted in The American South in the 1960's, Avery L. Leiserson, ed., p. 20.

³Sellers, The Southerner as American, p. 128.

⁴Charles L. Black, Jr., quoted in The South and the Sectional Image, Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., ed., p. 119.

One such is an old-fashioned liberal named James McBride Dabbs, who writes that "we are Southerners together as well as men together with the possibility of community." A democracy, he predicts, "may arise among us, richer than any we've ever known."¹

W. J. Cash, in the closing words of The Mind of the South, examines his land, its good and its bad--and ends prophetically but yet on a note of optimism:

Proud, brave, honorable by its lights, courteous, personally generous, loyal, swift to act, often too swift, but signally effective, sometimes terrible, in its action--such was the South at its best. And such at its best it remains today, despite the great falling away in some of its virtues. Violence, intolerance, aversion and suspicion toward new ideas, an incapacity for analysis, an inclination to act from feeling rather than from thought, an exaggerated individualism and a too narrow concept of social responsibility, attachment to fictions and false values, above all too great attachment to racial values and a tendency to justify cruelty and injustice in the name of those values, sentimentality and a lack of realism--these have been its characteristic vices in the past. And, despite changes for the better, they remain its characteristic vices today.

In the coming days, and probably soon, it is likely to have to prove its capacity for adjustment far beyond what has been true in the past. And in that time I shall hope, as its loyal son, that its virtues will tower over and conquer its faults and have the making of the Southern world to come.²

But of them all, Martin Luther King perhaps said it best on a summer's day in Washington--and if his dream should come to pass in our time, a remarkable and tragic land can vindicate its claim to a true and meaningful distinctiveness. "I have a dream," spoke King,

¹ Dabbs, Who Speaks for the South?, p. 367.

² Cash, Mind of the South, pp. 439-440.

"that one day the grandsons of former slaves and the grandsons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

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